

eCommerce Platform for Social Organizations



Francois Gaouette - CEO

CEOCFO: Mr. Gaouette, what is Amilia Corporation?

Mr. Gaouette: Amilia is a software company bringing the world of ecommerce to social organizations. A social organization is any organization dealing with activities, memberships or donations i.e. sports and recreation, arts, professional associations and charities. More often than not, these organizations are not using the web to its full potential. We looked at that market and came to the conclusion that what happened in the retail sector with ecommerce has not yet happened in the world of social organizations. If these organizations do not embrace the e-commerce revolution than the younger generation, like my son who is 20 years old won't be doing business with them. Let me explain; he will never download and print a form and send a check. He expects to deal with all of these social organizations the same way he is dealing with Amazon: putting things into a cart and buying them. That is what we do. We built an ecommerce platform specifically for businesses who sell activities, memberships and collect donations. We give them the ability to build a store, be online, be found and transact.

CEOCFO: Do you find that although these organizations are late to the game, they have come to the realization that they need to be up to date?

Mr. Gaouette: Most of them know they are missing something. They are catching up but their participants, members and donors are the ones who are pushing a lot on them there. As a parent, when it comes time to register your son to hockey season, you want to do it online with your iPad in your bed at 11 o'clock with your credit card. You do not want to go show up at the rink and wait in line with a check.

The problem is that historically they have not had access to much technology tailored for their needs. These types of organizations tend to be local. If you take a tennis class, you are probably going to take it close to where you live. Because of this, they serve only their community; they tend not to grow beyond a certain point. They are mostly small to medium sized, meaning they do not have the human or financial resources to invest in technology. Now with the Internet and SaaS models, all they have to do is subscribe. With their web browser, they can build their store, take online registrations and transactions, manage their clients and promote themselves online.

CEOCFO: How do people find Amilia?

Mr. Gaouette: That is the biggest challenge. We are targeting a very large market because social organizations are everywhere and are all very different while still very similar. We use the web to build awareness, and we create a lot of content to educate those organizations specifically. We also go trade shows to meet people face-to-face. Word of mouth has been great for us because parents who have used Amilia to register for one organization recommend that other organizations they are members of use it too.

CEOCFO: Are you able to work through organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce?

Mr. Gaouette: We are working on that, and we are going to have something set up soon. There are many of these types of potential clients/partners in chambers of commerce. To explain, if a chamber of commerce has 1,000 members they could be a client of Amilia and could offer the platform to their 1,000 members, who could also use Amilia for their businesses. It is a win-win for the association and its members. We're in the process of working out relationships where the chamber of commerce benefits from a discount and a commission by promoting Amilia to its members. The clubs benefit by being members, and the association has a new revenue stream.

CEOCFO: *With so many ways to get your message across, how do you decide where to focus?*

Mr. Gaouette: We are trying to be as generic as possible because we can deal with a charity one day and an after school program and a swim club the next. All of these organizations have the same business process and the same business needs, so we can be very general while building the platform. However, they all speak different languages. If you are an association, you talk about membership management. If you are a charity, you talk about donor management, and if you are a sports or recreation organization, you talk about online registration. First, we focus on educating these orgs about the benefits of e-commerce and all the possibilities it opens up. Then, we create content specific to all the different verticals.

CEOCFO: *How does an implementation work? What is involved for an organization?*

Mr. Gaouette: Because we're a SaaS and we have a self-serve model, the implementation is pretty simple. Once they become interested in Amilia they visit our site and ask for a free trial. They'll get their trial account, and they can play around with it for 30 days. We then call them up and offer them some onboarding support and helping navigate the platform. They already have activities, memberships, merchandise and fundraisers so they need to enter that information and that structure into Amilia to set up their "Store". Within a couple hours they can be up and running!

CEOCFO: *How else can a platform be used for an organization?*

Mr. Gaouette: An organization can use a platform to sell their membership and classes, a chamber of commerce will use the platform to sell memberships, and a charity will use the platform to collect donations. The real strength of the platform is that all of those things are inside one store. Now you can sign up for a chamber of commerce and in the same process buy your membership, register for the cocktail dinner, buy some books or t-shirts, and even donate \$20 to their fundraising campaign. We also have a pretty robust back-end that help these organizations manage their members, activities, inventory and fundraising campaigns, communicate with their clients and even generate reports and statistics. It eliminates a lot of the administrative tasks so that their staff and volunteers can focus on other areas like marketing and growth.

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CEOCFO: *Does calling it a store confuse organizations?*

Mr. Gaouette: Some of them. It's understandable because they don't see themselves as merchants. Just because you aren't selling tangible goods does not mean you are not a merchant. We call it a store because it's a space where you can load up your cart and check out. Explaining to people that what they put in their cart can be classes or memberships is a challenge. That's why we work on educating them first before we try to sell them the platform.

CEOCFO: *What is your geographic reach today?*

Mr. Gaouette: Right now, we are very strong in the province of Quebec and the rest of Canada. We just broke into the US in August of this year and we are putting a lot of resources into that while still focusing on areas here where we have a critical mass.

CEOCFO: *Why is this the time for the move into the US?*

Mr. Gaouette: We spent a lot of time building that platform and creating something totally different. Staying in Quebec has helped us build relationships with our clients and get to know their needs, pain points and expectations. Once we felt confident enough in the software, we released it to the rest of Canada and now the United States. We looked at what was currently out there for social organizations and realized there were needs that weren't being met. When a soccer club or association wants to jump on the e-commerce bandwagon, they cannot use any of those platforms for a number of reasons. The most obvious one is if you buy a membership or you buy a swim class, as a club owner I need to manage participation and relationships, which is not the case in traditional ecommerce. In my case, I will probably have to send you some emails reminding you about the event. I also need to manage attendees and participation. I care about who is coming to that class, who is buying that membership, and who is giving me money. I need to attach a person to what has been bought. That is unique. When I have attached a person to what has been bought, I need to capture a lot of information. I call that form-based organization. If you think about it, every time you buy a membership or an activity, you fill out a form. If it is for a camp for youth, there might be questions about who will pick up the children. It is much more than just your address, which any traditional ecommerce platform will ask for. There is a lot of business logic involved as well, such as prerequisites for classes or qualifications for classes. We do prerequisites based on age, gender and skills. There is a pre-registration period, and these are the people who are allowed to sign-up first. We also use business logic to

bundle things like activities and memberships, promotions like: membership price is different than a non-member price, a second child in the family gets a discount, and if you are living in a certain city you will get a discount. These are all things that traditional e-commerce platforms aren't able to support.

CEOCFO: *There is a lot of opportunity with Amilia Corporation that organizations may not realize!*

Mr. Gaouette: Yes. There are great opportunities for new revenue streams for all these organizations. They possess something unique and that is the relationship they have with their members and clients. They need to leverage this! For example, I have a relationship with my daughter's dance studio, and that dance studio is not well equipped to sell merchandise or tickets to shows because they do not have an e-commerce platform. Once they do, now they are no different than Amazon. They can start selling other stuff in their store, and that other stuff can be an iPad or a TV. Because of my connection and relationship with the studio I would rather buy from them than the Apple Store. That is what we consider real social commerce.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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